

book's conclusion, the editors provide biographical details regarding each letter writer. This very basic, yet often overlooked, element in historical texts ties together the letters to the actual women, embodying their words with their existence.

The book's most vital contribution is that the editors allowed the narrative to speak for itself. Translation or grand theorising of such words would dull the recognition that each of these women deserved and is deserving of. These letters were written with a specific audience in mind, in an attempt to pursue a particular objective in the most convincing manner. Many women write about their strong ties to Christianity, their abstention from drink and, perhaps most strikingly, their self-removal from other Aboriginal community members in order to appease station managers. Can such self-representation be taken as historically 'authentic'? As Gayatri Spivak queried in 1988 regarding the subaltern, is it possible for us to read these women as speaking wholly for themselves? Perhaps many of them were strategically engaging in language and behaviour that the Board would have liked to hear, in order to navigate a new system of colonial management.

This collection of letters presents a history that has not previously been recorded and examined for two main reasons. Firstly, those existing on the margins of colonial Australia, both due to gender and race, did not formally 'contribute' to forming the Commonwealth and thus were left out of scholarly texts. Secondly, the daily undertakings of Aboriginal women living on stations and reserves were 'authentically' documented by station managers or secretaries. Such reconfiguring of the subject in historical texts is slowly becoming more common and *Letters* provides an example of a nuanced approach to scholarship. It should be read by those wanting to understand the complex dialogue between the paternalistic Board of Protection and a select group of Victorian Aboriginal women who are finally given an opportunity and the space to use the written word on their own behalf.

Niki Calastas
University of Melbourne

Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939

Edited by Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law
(Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2003)

300pp, illustrations, maps, \$44.99, paperback

In editing *Sites of Gender*, these New Zealand scholars have provided us with a remarkable contribution to modern labour history. Robin Law's part in this project was completed before her sad death. The three editors, with their talented group of co-researchers, undertook the ambitious task of placing gender at the centre of an analysis of work and family in Caversham, Dunedin, as the impact of modernity became starkly apparent. These writers came to this history with insights derived from interdisciplinary perspectives: not only as historians but as geographers, demographers, economists, and scholars

in gender studies, whose strengths considerably enrich the joint task they have undertaken. We could describe their accomplishment, in E. P. Thompson's terms, as rescuing the citizens of Caversham from the condescension of posterity. They regard with seriousness the activities, choices and interactions of ordinary citizens set within economic and political contexts.

The history of the inhabitants of this industrial area of New Zealand during a crucial period emerges with clarity and complexity in a fine study that accomplishes goals to which social historians more often aspire than achieve. In part, the book's success is grounded in its origins in an impressive wide-ranging data collection, led by Erik Olssen, from which other publications have emerged. In no small measure, its success also stems from the writers' grounding in the theoretical framework of gender studies. Their goal was to trace the impact of industrialisation on a New Zealand population and to discover how behaviour and practices associated with modernity were accepted and played out in this specific context. The study brought under its umbrella people of a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, but the population was overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic. There were few Maori of full or mixed descent in this southern site. The authors foreground the recovery of women's and men's lives with a generous breadth within a range of sites—at home and work, in churches, institutions and courts, in sporting and political pursuits.

It is hard in a collection with this genesis to discuss individual authors' chapters, and indeed, many chapters are co-written. The three editors have made substantial contributions along with the colleagues involved over the years in the Caversham project. Barbara Brooks, for example, contributes on the nature of marriage, gender and health, and the emerging proliferation of leisure pursuits. Annabel Cooper, with others, considers politics in the district and the gendering of poverty; and Robin Law examines how people travelled to and from their varying locations. Some scholars offer meta-narratives, as does Erik Olssen when he stresses change and continuities in the gendering of work over a long period. Others focus more on aspects of particular institutions and their impact. Dorothy Page, Howard Lee and Tom Brooking, for example, have looked at gendered aspects of schooling; John Stenhouse at the churches, spirituality and religious understandings; Jane Malthus and Chris Bricknell take us through a particular case study of clothing. The cohesiveness, however, is sustained through their common theoretical approaches as well as their reliance on this remarkable pool of empirical data.

Overall, the writers' stress is on Caversham lives together in families, communities, work and leisure, across childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. They demonstrate that these women and men shared much of a lifetime's experiences, but also in ways particular to their gender as well as their class. Moreover, the authors sustain a presentation of gender that is fluid, always in process, always negotiated. There could not be a single narrative that carried the story of the history of women and gender, nor do the writers attempt one. They show, however, that none escaped the impact of modernity. The people of Caversham vary enormously since some were in a better position than others to take advantage of modernity's promises. There were the new 'talkies' for entertainment; bicycles, cars and buses facilitated mobility; new technology began to absorb some of the burden of heavy physical work. The young single women who obtained waged work appeared for a period of their life span to grasp at greater personal autonomy.

Housewives, by contrast, received the promises of modernity only slowly, as home workers, since technology was harnessed to domestic labour more gradually, and only the most prosperous men earned sufficient wages to purchase the new household appliances. All women were granted the vote in 1893, giving them a direct stake in mainstream politics and the right to direct representation some twenty years later. But modernity also brought its complex challenges: this is no simple story of progress.

It is commendable that, in an age that prioritises individual scholarly achievement, such a fine collaborative venture could be sustained through years of painstaking research to have such a constructive outcome. This book will place Dunedin on the map of internationally significant sites of scholarship in social and labour history and in gender studies. The Auckland University Press, incidentally, has brought out a handsome production complete with useful photographs and maps.

Patricia Grimshaw
University of Melbourne

Chinese Women and the Global Village: An Australian Site

Jan Ryan (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 2003)

209pp, illustrations, \$30.00; paperback

Jan Ryan has constructed an ambitious and highly accessible compilation of Chinese women's experiences of transnationalism. Focusing on the Australian case, she draws from a range of statistical and interview data to successfully address the 'families, economic enterprises, community formation, political and social movements, and other aspects of the Asian Australian experiences' (p. 1). Ryan's discussion of Chinese women's multi-faceted experiences is strongly informed by contemporary theorisations of gender, identity and ethnicity, which are themselves theoretically contextualised by discourses of globalisation and transnationalism.

Ryan begins her analysis with a broader discussion of women's migration experiences, noting the prevalent 'invisibility of women' (p. 15) in mainstream migration studies. By so doing, she promises a unique and important investigation into this much neglected area. The personal narratives used to exemplify Chinese women's migration experiences lend a liveliness to the text while bringing to light diverse personalities and perspectives. These personalities are well-contextualised through the employment of a range of studies and government data sets.

Ryan's methodology is never thoroughly explained, however, and the first appearances of statistical data may leave more qualitative-oriented readers wondering how these numbers gel with a study focused on the 'personal and discrete migrant experience' (p. 1). Also, relative to methodology, Ryan's lack of personal reflexivity (as separate from the 'self-reflexivity' apparent in the interviews) is quite unusual among contemporary feminist studies, especially those whose subjects come from 'ethnic' backgrounds. These methodological gaps, while noticeable, should not, however, detract from the obvious care and concern with which Ryan has gathered her data. Indeed, the collection of fifty interviews